

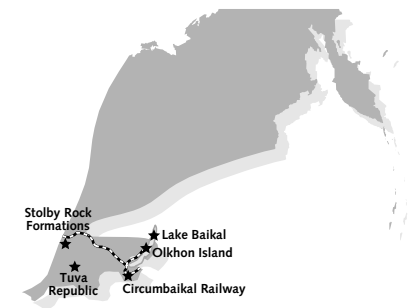
Krasnoyarsk to Lake Baikal

By Trans-Siberian standards this route is just a short hop. But it offers several intriguing possible variants. Krasnoyarsk, whose grand new, spired station looks vaguely like a Prussian Helmet, is the most sensible point to switch onto the wild Baikal-Amur Mainline (Baikalo-Amurskaya Magistral; BAM) for northern Lake Baikal and beyond. It's also where trains head south towards the fascinating Tuva Republic for throat singing or encounters with real-life shamans. You could even take one of the regular summer ferries up the 4102km Yenisey River: these steam all the way to the Arctic Circle and beyond, though without Norilsk permits you'd have to return to Krasnoyarsk again. Vastly easier river excursions whisk visitors an hour south to Divnogorsk by hydrofoil to observe one of Russia's biggest dams.

For many travellers, magical Baikal, the world's deepest lake, is the highlight of a Trans-Siberian odyssey. The tracks actually pass right along the southern shore, offering great views, especially between Slyudyanka and Baikalsk. With a little spoken Russian and a sense of adventure, lakeside Slyudyanka actually makes a feasible hop-off point, as it's the starting point for visiting the enticing mountain spa of Arshan and for taking the beautiful Circumbaikal Railway. However, the vast majority of foreign visitors get off instead at Irkutsk, a much bigger and more attractive city, where you can find English-speaking assistance. As Irkutsk is actually 70km from the lake, use buses or tours to see the glorious waters whether at convenient, tourist-orientated Listvyanka or meditational Olkhon Island, which is increasingly Baikal's favoured getaway. To visit eastern Baikal (p218), continue to Ulan-Ude (p213).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Beat the crowds to meditatively beautiful **Olkhon Island** (p203)
- Ride the slow but scenic **Circumbaikal Railway** (p205) hugging Baikal's lakeshore cliffs
- Contemplate the weird **Stolby rock formations** (p187) near Krasnoyarsk
- Take a fascinating cultural and scenic side trip to the wild **Tuva Republic** (p190)
- Cross **Lake Baikal** (p198) on the winter ice or by summer hydrofoil



■ ROUTE DISTANCE: 1088KM

■ DURATION: ONE DAY, 17½ TO 20 HOURS

THE ROUTE

Heading east out of Krasnoyarsk (4098km), trains cross a 1km-long **Yenisey River bridge**, whose 1898 original won a gold medal at the 1900 Paris Expo. The *Rossiya* makes short stops at **Zaozernaya** (4265km), from where a line runs north to the off-limits space centre of Krasnoyarsk-45, and at **Kansk-Yeniseysky** (4344km). Historic Kansk, founded in 1640, boasts a scattering of century-old buildings, a renovated Trinity Cathedral and a cinematographic museum.

Ilanskaya (Ilansky; 4377km) has a small **museum** (☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) in the 100-year-old, red-brick locomotive depot at the west-

ern end of the station, and an old locomotive and water tower behind the wooden station building. You'll have 20 minutes, but we really recommend that you *don't* take photographs. Getting arrested can mess up all your plans.

At **4474km**, the train passes into Irkutsk *oblast* (region); local time becomes Moscow time plus five hours.

The *Rossiya* stops five minutes at **Tayshet** (4515km), the Trans-Siberian's westernmost junction with the BAM and once an infamous transit point for Gulag prisoners.

If riding straight through from Moscow, you're now on day four and already halfway to the Pacific. As the railway skirts the foothills of the **Sayan Mountains**, endless taiga

forests and a real sense of wilderness set in. However, at around **4560km** the line rises above the taiga and sweeps around bends for many kilometres offering good photo opportunities.

There's a 15-minute stop at **Nizhneudinsk** (4678km), where Cossacks first built a fortress in 1649. Today the molybdenum mines and a 'Mice Factory' (sic), which the town lists inscrutably as 'attractions', are unlikely to appeal. Further east the landscape becomes flatter and the forests have been extensively logged. At **Tulun** (4795km) a road heads 225km north to Bratsk (p243). Trains pause for two minutes.

After a 20-minute stop in the former exile-town **Zima** (4934km), which translates ominously as 'winter', the train heads south-east, shadowing the Angara River. There are several inconsequential short stops, including at **Angarsk** (5145km), whose oil and petrochemical industries are economically important if hardly attractive. There's a clock museum if you really want to get off.

Around the **5171km** marker, look north through the trees; 50m beyond the tracks behind two barbed wire fences are neat rows of decommissioned old tanks and rocket-launcher trucks (without rockets) rusting away thinking of their Cold War heyday.

The train crosses the Irkut River 3km before **Irkutsk** (5185km) station. Once nicknamed the 'Paris of Siberia', Irkutsk is the most popular Siberian stop for most transcontinental travellers, notably as a launching point to reach Lake Baikal, 70km further southeast.

KRASNOYARSK КРАСНОЯРСК

☎ 3912 / pop 871,000 / ☎ Moscow +4hr

Backed by attractive spikes of jagged, forested foothills, Krasnoyarsk has a much more appealing setting than most typically flat Siberian cities. While architecture isn't a particular strength, amid the predominantly unattractive concrete of post-WWII industrialisation are a few outstandingly well-embellished timber mansions and a sprinkling of Art Nouveau curves. Pleasant river trips and the nearby Stolby Nature Reserve, as well as the region's best concert halls, theatres and museums, make Krasnoyarsk a most agreeable place to break a Trans-Siberian journey between Lake Baikal and Tomsk (or Novosibirsk).

Orientation

The city's ferro-concrete central square is near the Yenisey River's north bank, where pedestrianised ul Uritskogo is gashed by ul Veynbauma. The Stolby Nature Reserve is around 20km away, south of the Yenisey.

MAPS

Extremely useful Krasnoyarsk transport maps (R38) are sold within the bus, train and river stations, at the Regional Museum (below) and from bookshops, such as **Russkoye Slovo** (ul Lenina 28; ☎ 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat).

Information

lnpexbank (pr Mira 5; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sun) Long hours and good rates for Euros. For dollars use ROSBank.

Internet Klub (ul Lenina 153; per hr R35; ☎ 9am-10pm) Beneath Mister Dzhin.

Internet Termen (☎ 653 290; ul Parizhskoy Kommuny 33; per hr R40; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-10pm Sat & Sun)

KBPE (Krasnoyarskoye Byuro Putishestviy i Ekskursiy; ☎ 271 626; alftur@hotelkrs.ru; Ground fl, Hotel Krasnoyarsk; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Commercial tour agency.

Paradoks (☎ 239 795; pr Mira 96; per hr for up to 3MB R25; ☎ 24hr) The best, central Internet access. Entered from an inner courtyard facing sign to the Alazani Georgian restaurant.

Post office (ul Lenina 62; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat)

ROSBank (pr Mira 7; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) Gives good rates for US dollars cash and changes travellers cheques.

Sberbank (ul Ablakhovychy 2; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) Exchange services; fairly handy for the train station.

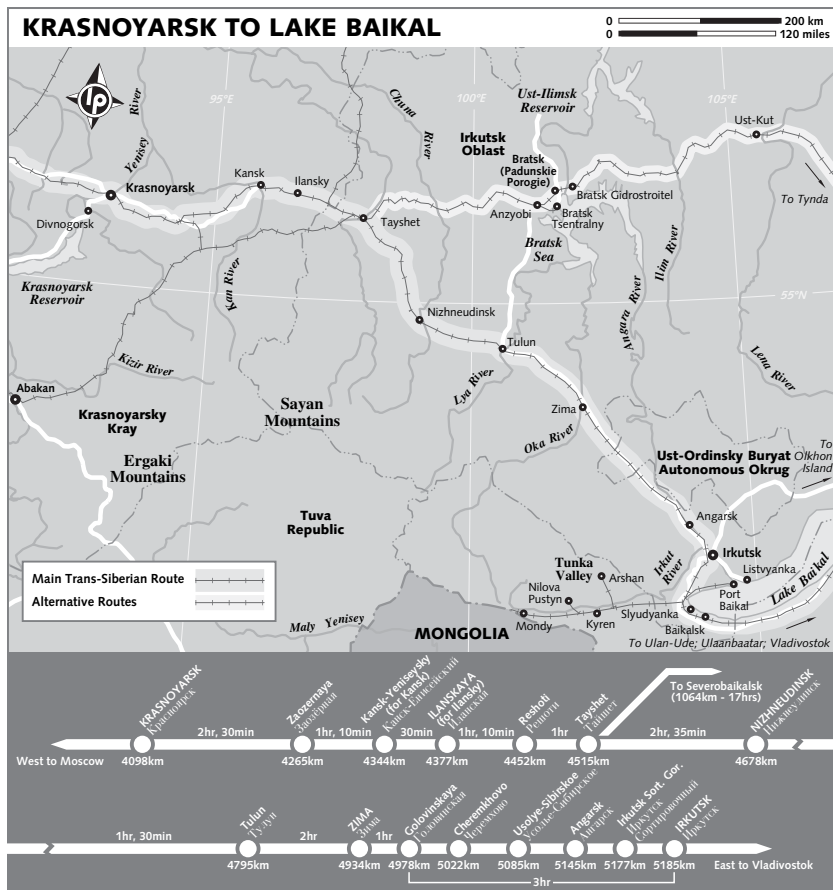
Telephone office (pr Mira 102; ☎ 7am-2pm & 3pm-midnight)

Sights

MUSEUMS & CHURCHES

The **Regional Museum** (Kraevedchesky muzey; ☎ 226 511; ul Dubrovinskogo 84; admission R30; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sun) is one of Siberia's best. It's housed in a marvellously incongruous building that looks more suited to Luxor – the architect was obsessed with Egypt. Exhibits include a full-scale replica of a boat used by the Cossack explorers and a fine ethnographic section on indigenous shamanic peoples. The appealing gift shop sells old coins, medals, postcards and excellent maps.

The lovely **Surikov Museum-Estate** (Muзей-usadba V I Surikova; ☎ 231 507; ul Lenina 98; admission R30;



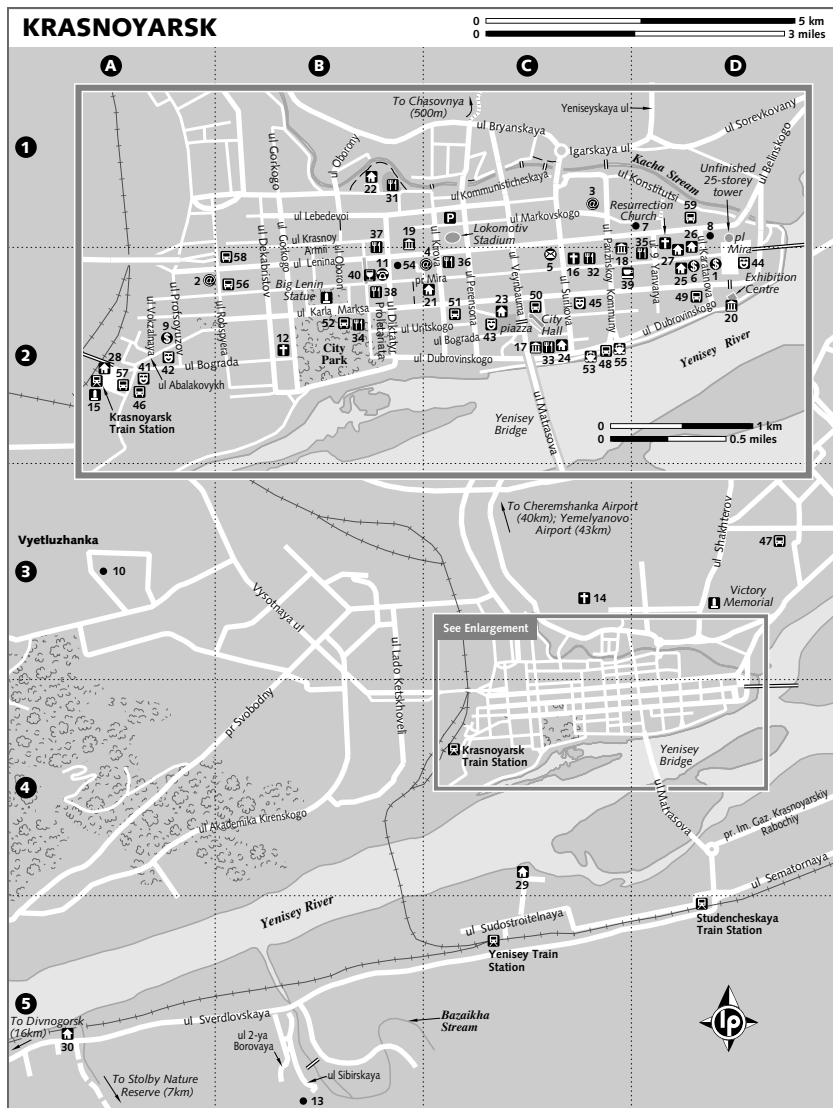
☞ 11am–6pm Tue–Sat) preserves the house, sheds and vegetable patch of 19th-century painter Vasilii Surikov (1848–1916). The heavy-gated garden forms a refreshing oasis of rural Siberia right in the city centre. More of Surikov's work is on show at the cute **Surikov Art Museum** (☎ 272 558; ul Parizhskoy Kommuny 20; ☞ 11am–6pm Tue–Sun).

Permanently docked below an ugly Exhibition Centre, the **SV Nikolay** (admission \$0.20; ☞ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) was a boat on which Lenin was transported to exile in 1897. It houses some intriguing exhibits, but was being restored at the time of research.

For great city views climb Karaulnaya Hill to the **Chasovnya Chapel**, which features

on the Russian R10 banknote. At noon there's a deafening one-gun salute here. Attractive old churches include the fancy 1795 **Intercession Cathedral** (Pokrovsky sobor; ul Surikova) and the top-heavy but elegant 1804–22 **Blagoveshchensky Church** (ul 9 Января), whose icon-filled interior billows with incense.

guide.com) – priced according to itinerary – or all in Russian through KBPE (p185; six-hour tours per person for groups of many/three/two/one R500/700/1000/1500). Remember that encephalitis-infected ticks are dangerous between May and July.



STOLBY NATURE RESERVE

Arguably Krasnoyarsk's greatest attractions are the spiky volcanic rock pillars called Stolby. These litter the woods in the 17,000-hectare Stolby Nature Reserve (Zapovednik Stolby) south of the Yenisey River, around 20km from the city centre. The main concentration is reached by walking 7km down a track from near Turbaza Yenisey, itself over 10km southwest of the city centre by bus 50a from the station. Much easier access is via a **chair lift** from beside **Kafe Bobrov log** (ul Sibirskaya). This usually runs year-round on request, but was closed throughout 2005 during a massive ski-slope redevelopment. From the top of the chair lift, walk two minutes to a great viewpoint or around 40 minutes to reach the impressive **Takmak Stolby**.

Tours are available, personalised in English with **SibTourGuide** (☎ 512 654; www.sibtour

DIVNOGORSK

The scenic Yenisey River gorge is popularly viewed from Krasnoyarsk to Divnogorsk hydrofoil rides. A 5km taxi-hop beyond Divnogorsk jetty is the impressive 1km-long **hydroelectric dam** (GES). Visiting the turbine rooms isn't allowed, but from a distance you can observe the remarkable moving basin that allows ships to cross the dam. Boat rentals are available on the reservoir beyond. Hydrofoils (R70, 45 minutes) sail between Krasnoyarsk and Divnogorsk every two hours from May to late September. Pay on board. The trip is also pleasant by road allowing a stop in semi-quiet Ovsyanka village, with its cute wooden **St Innokenty Chapel** (ul Shchetinkina) and two interesting **House Museums** (ul Shchetinkina 26 & 35; admission R30; ☞ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) related to celebrated writer Victor Astafyev (1924–2001).

INFORMATION

Ипрехбанк Инлексбанк.....	1	D2
Internet Klub Интернет Клуб.....	2	A2
Internet Termen		
Интернет Термен.....	3	C1
КВРРЕ..... (see 23)		
Парадокс Парадокс.....	4	C2
Post office.....	5	C2
ROSBank.....	6	D2
Russkoye Slovo Русское Слово.....	7	D1
Sayan Ring Travel.....	8	D1
Sberbank.....	9	A2
SibTourGuide.....	10	A3
Telephone office		
Междугородный телефон.....	11	B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Catholic Church (Organ Hall).....	12	B2
Chair Lift Фуникольор.....	13	B5
Chasovnya Chapel Часовня.....	14	C3
Communist Era Mosaic.....	15	A2
Intercession Cathedral		
Покровский Собор.....	16	C2
Regional Museum		
Краеведческий музей.....	17	C2
Surikov Art Museum		
Художественный музей имени В И Сурикова.....	18	C2
Surikov Museum-Estate.....	19	B1
SV Nikolay Св Николай.....	20	D2

SLEEPING

Hotel Gostiny Dvor		
Гостиница Гостинный Двор.....	21	C2

Hotel Kolos		
Гостиница Колос.....	22	B1
Hotel Krasnoyarsk		
Гостиница Красноярск.....	23	C2
Hotel Ogni Yeniseyua		
Гостиница Огни Енисея.....	24	C2
Hotel Oktyabrskaya		
Гостиница Октябрьская.....	25	D2
Krasnoyarskstroystroitelnya		
Гостиница Красноярскстройстратегия.....	26	D1
Metelitsa Guest House		
Метелица.....	27	D2
Resting Rooms		
Комнаты Отдыха.....	28	A2
Siberian Safari Club		
Сибирский Сафари Клуб.....	29	C4
Turbaza Yenisey		
Турбаза Енисей.....	30	A5

EATING

Central Market		
Центральный Рынок.....	31	B1
Gastronom Krasnyyag		
Гастроном Красноярск.....	32	C2
Kofeynya Кофейня.....	33	C2
Luch Луч.....	34	B2
Mama Roma.....	35	D2
Nevskoe Kafe		
Невское Кафе.....	36	C2
Subito Субито.....	37	B1
Telega Телега.....	38	B2
Terrasa Kafe		
ЛучиоТерасса Кафе..... (see 34)		

DRINKING

Kafe Retro Кафе Петро.....	39	C2
Kantri Кантри.....	40	B2

ENTERTAINMENT

Che Guevara Че Гуевара.....	41	A2
Havana Club Гавана Клуб.....	42	A2
Opera-Ballet Theatre		
Театр оперы и балета.....	43	C2
Philharmonia Филармония.....	44	D2
Rock-Jazz Kafe		
Рок-Джаз Кафе.....	45	C2

TRANSPORT

Bus 50a to Zoo.....	46	A2
Bus Station Автовокзал.....	47	D3
Buses to Divnogorsk.....	48	C2
Eastbound Trolleybus 7.....	49	D2
Eastbound Trolleybus 7, Bus 50a to Zoo.....	50	C2
Eastbound Trolleybus 7, Bus 50a to Zoo.....	51	C2
Eastbound Trolleybus 7, Bus 50a to Zoo.....	52	B2
Hydrofoils to Divnogorsk.....	53	C2
KrasAir.....	54	B2
Luch Луч.....	55	C2
River Station Речной вокзал.....		
Trolleybus 5 from Train Station.....	56	B2
Trolleybus 7 to Centre.....	57	A2
Trolleybus 7 to Train Station & Telega Телега.....	58	B2
Westbound Trolleybus 7, Bus 50 to Zoo.....	59	D1

summer accommodation can be stretched and relatively expensive by Siberian standards. Book ahead.

History

Founded in 1651 as a Cossack garrison to control the indigenous Buryats, Irkutsk was the springboard for 18th-century expeditions to the far north and east. This included Alaska, then known as 'Irkutsk's American district'.

As eastern Siberia's trading and administrative centre, Irkutsk dispatched Siberian furs to Mongolia, Tibet and China in exchange for silk and tea. Its most illustrious 19th-century residents were Decembrists (see p194) and Polish rebels who formed a rough-hewn aristocracy valuing education, the arts and political awareness.

Three-quarters of the city burnt down in the disastrous fire of 1879. However, the Lena Basin gold rush of the 1880s quickly

restored its grand brick mansions and public buildings, many of which still stand today.

Irkutsk did not welcome news of the October Revolution. The city's well-to-do merchants only succumbed to the Red tide in 1920, with the capture and execution of white army commander Admiral Kolchak, whose statue has recently been re-erected. Soviet-era planning saw Irkutsk develop as a sprawling industrial and scientific centre, which it remains today.

KHAKASSIA & TUVA

Around 200,000 Tuvans make up 64% of the population of the **Tuva Republic** (capital: Kyzyl), an other-worldly region where the mesmerising grassland hills are ringed by beautiful forested mountains. Tuvans are an ethnically Mongol people, whose Tibetan Buddhist faith retains strong elements of shamanism. Today Tuva's active shamans and its gamut of Mongolian-style cultural pursuits, including sumo-style *khuresh* wrestling, are part of its attraction. But a special draw is Tuva's extraordinary *khöömei* throat singing. Hearing some is easy on the soundtrack of Oscar-nominated film *Genghis Blues* or by downloading tracks from www.tarbagan.com. But witnessing the extraordinary sounds coming live from a Tuvan throat is one of Siberia's most surreal experiences.

Tuva was part of the Chinese Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries before becoming nominally independent as Tannu Tuva from 1921 to 1944. Tannu Tuva is best remembered for its fanciful triangular postage stamps, and for inspiring the classic travel book *Tuva or Bust* by Ralph Leighton and Richard Feynman. Traditionally, Tuvans were hunters or herders of reindeer, horses, sheep and yak. Today a few seminomadic Tuvan herders still live in summer yurt tents, though these are a vastly less common sight than the similar *ger* (felt) tents you will see across the nearby Mongolian border.

En route to Tuva you'll likely transit the **Khakassia Republic** (capital: Abakan). The ethnically Turkic Khakass people are the local remnants of the 'Yenisey Kyrgyz' empire that stretched from Kazakhstan to Lake Baikal from the 6th to the 13th century. The Khakass were once shamanistic nomadic herders, but widespread Christianisation accompanied heavy Russian colonisation, and they now represent just over 10% of the republic's population. Nonetheless, their long history has left the vast flat grasslands pocked with some remarkable standing stones and *kurgan* (grave mounds). In the far south Khakassia and Southern Krasnoyarsk Kray meet Tuva in the spectacularly spiky Ergaki Mountain range. See Lonely Planet's *Russia & Belarus* guide for more details.

Visiting Khakassia & Tuva

Khakassia's dull but pleasantly green capital Abakan is an easy overnight train hop from Krasnoyarsk. Shared taxis meet arriving trains and continue across a wonderfully scenic road to Kyzyl in Tuva (R800, 5½ hours), where charming professional translator **Aylana Irguit** (☎ 39422-13 796 home, 39422-34 790 work; www.tyvantranslator.com; per hr US\$15-40) can help you meet throat singers and **EcoTuva** (☎ 39422-10 527 or 14 579; www.ecotuva.ru) offers imaginative excursions.

Krasnoyarsk-based agency **Sayan Ring Travel** (☎ /fax 3912-522 481; www.gotosiberia.ru; office 545, Metropolis Bldg, pr Mira 10, Krasnoyarsk; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri) runs regular full-comfort tours of the region that include accommodation in tourist yurt camps, cultural shows and excursions to Shushenskoye, where Lenin was exiled. Similar but tailor-made trips are well-priced from Abakan-based agent **Abakan Tours** (☎ 39022-23 284; parkhotel@inbox.ru, attention: Sergei Mechtanov; Hotel Park-Otel, Abakan; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri). While in Abakan, train buffs should take half an hour to visit the new **Railway Museum** (Музей Зheleznoy Dorogi; Abakan station concourse; admission R30; ☎ 11am-7pm Wed-Mon). It's diagonally across the station forecourt and exhibits engineers' uniforms through the ages, 22 types of historical rail-couplings and a model of Abakan station in 1925.

Orientation

The bustling train station is directly across the Angara River from the city centre. Grand ul Karla Marksa is the historic commercial centre. From the administrative centre (pl Kirova), ul Lenina parallels the river to the Raising-of-the-Cross Church, where it becomes ul Sedova. Nearly 6km further south this road's continuation reaches the Angara Dam (GES). Many hotels, souvenir stalls and bookshops sell various city maps. Shop around as prices vary drastically.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Epitsentr (ul Sukhe-Batora 18; per hr R45-60; ☎ 24hr) Best Internet connection in town.

Kofeynya Karta (ul Marata 38; per hr R45; ☎ 9am-11pm) An inviting cellar Internet coffee shop serving real espresso (R33).

Web-Ugol (ul Lenina 13; per hr R45; ☎ 10am-10pm) Downstairs, easy to miss.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Baikal.ru (www.baikal.ru) Partly translated with old-postcard portraits of various Irkutsk streets.

ICC (www.irkutsk.com) History, maps and tourist information.

IrkutskOut (www.irkutskout.ru in Russian) Café and restaurant listings.

MONEY

Bank Soyuz Booth (Hotel Baikal, bul Gagarina 44) Changes money, including Chinese yuan, 22 hours a day.

Guta Bank (ul Dzerzhinskogo) foyer booth (☎ 11am-3pm & 4-6.45pm Mon-Fri); Valyutnaya Kassa No 1 (☎ 9am-2pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) Good US dollar rate from the foyer booth. Travellers cheques swiftly cashed from inside Valyutnaya Kassa No 1.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Yustas Photo-Salon (ul Sukhe-Batora; ☎ 10am-6pm) Passport photos for those Mongolian visas.

POST & TELEPHONE

Main telephone office (ul Proletarskaya 12) Has 24-hour ATMs.

Post office (ul Stepana Razina 23; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat & Sun) Bigger branches are at per Bogdanov 8 and ul Karla Marksa 28.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Visitor Information Office (☎ 406 706; <http://baikal.info.ru>; ul Karla Marksa 26B; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) Useful and very unusual for Russia, but not always very imaginative beyond the tours that it sells.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Local tour operators can organise excursions, book hotels and get train tickets, but most have only one or two overstretched English speakers. Patience pays.

BaikalComplex (☎ 389 205; www.baikalcomplex.irk.ru) Busy, well-organised operation, offering homestays and tailored trips for Western travellers. Call to arrange a meeting.

Baikaler (☎ 336 240; www.baikaler.com) Imaginative Jack Sheremetoff speaks good English and is well tuned to budget travellers' needs. Imaginative tours and a great central hostel.

Green Express (☎ 563 400; www.greenexpress.ru; 7th fl, ul Baikalskaya 291; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Big, professional outfit, with a hotel in Listvyanka, yurts on Olkhon Island, and many mountain-biking, horse-riding and other tour options.

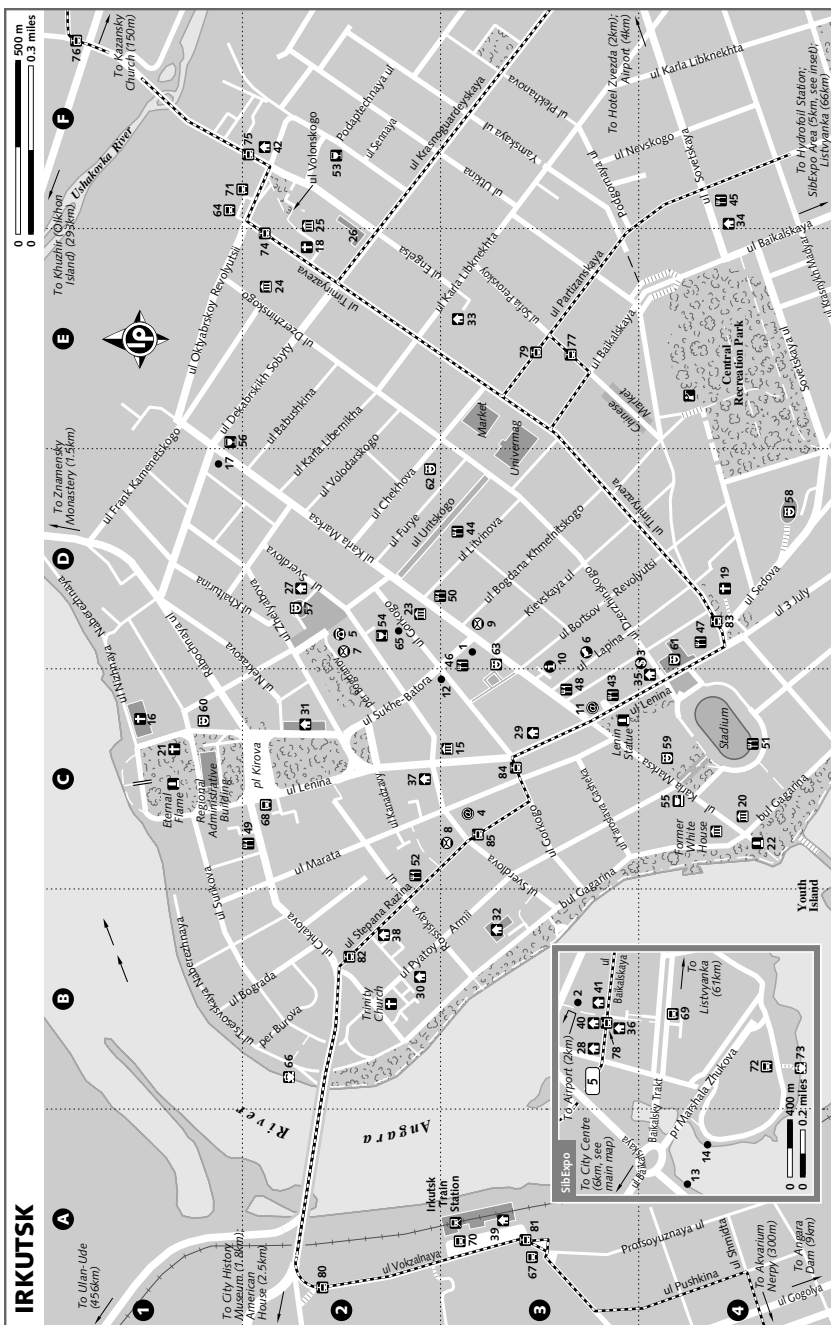
Sights

DECEMBRIST HOUSES

After completing their terms of labour near Chita, many Decembrists settled in Irkutsk with their families, who had earlier followed them into exile (see p194). Two of the homes (those of Prince Sergei Trubetskoy and Count Sergei Volkonsky) are now touching museums, complete with furnishings and pictures of family and friends.

The grey **Volkonsky House Museum** (☎ 207 532; per Volkonskogo 10; admission R50; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is through big heavy gates, just a short walk behind the pretty pink Preobrazheniya Gospodnya Church. The mansion is set in a courtyard with stables, a barn and servant quarters (beware of the dog). Downstairs is an (over-) renovated piano room; upstairs is a photo exhibition. Labels are in Russian only, but a R70 pamphlet tells the stories.

When Volkonsky House is closed on Monday try the smaller **Trubetskoy House Museum** (☎ 275 773; ul Dzerzhinskogo 64; admission R40; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu-Mon).



OTHER MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

Irkutsk's pleasant if fairly standard **Regional Museum** (Kraevedchesky muzey; ☎ 333 449; ul Karla Marksa 2; foreigner R100; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is within a fancy 1870s brick building that formerly housed the Siberian Geographical Society, a club of Victorian gentlemen-explorers. Equivalent museums in Chita and Krasnoyarsk are more impressive, though exhibits on the BAM and Trans-Sib railways are passingly interesting. The gift shop is great for birch-bark boxes (from R80) and jewellery made from chaorite, a unique purple Siberian mineral. Across the road, a bushy-bearded **statue of Tsar Alexander III**

on the riverfront promenade has replaced the Trans-Siberian Obelisk that formerly stood here.

The grand old **Art Gallery** (ul Lenina 5; foreigner R50; 🕒 10am-6pm Wed-Mon) has a valuable if poorly lit collection ranging from Mongolian *thangka* (Buddhist iconographic painting) to Russian-impressionist canvases. Behind a photogenic 1909 façade, its **sub-gallery** (ul Karla Marksa 23; admission R60; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is strong on Siberian landscapes and petroglyph rubbings, and has some superb 17th-century icons.

A collection of Soviet tanks and missile launchers guard the **Dom Ofitserov** (ul Karla

INFORMATION

Bank Soyuz Booth	
Банк Союз	(see 32)
Ерцисентр Ерцисентр	1 D3
Green Express	2 B3
Guta Bank Гута Банк	3 D4
Kofeynaya Karta	4 C3
Кофейная Карта	
Main Telephone Office	
Междугородный телефонный пункт	5 D2
Mongolian Consulate	
Консульство Монголии	6 D3
Post Office Почта	7 D2
Post Office Почта	8 C3
Post Office Почта	9 D3
Visitor Information Office	10 D3
Web-Ugol Web-Угол	11 C3
Yustas Photo-Salon	
Юстас Фото-Салон	12 C3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Angara Dam Ледокол Ангара	13 A4
Angara Steamship Ангара ГЭС	14 A4
Art Gallery	
Художественный Музей	15 C3
Vogoyavlensky Cathedral	
Богоявленский Собор	16 C1
Dom Ofitserov	
Дом Офицеров	17 D1
Preobrazheniya Gospodnya Church	
Преображения Господня Церковь	18 E2
Raising of the Cross Church	
Крестовоздвиженская церковь	19 D4
Regional Museum	
Краеведческий Музей	20 C4
Saviour's Church	
Спасская Церковь	21 C1
Statue of Tsar Alexander III	
Памятник Александр III	22 C4
sub-gallery	
Художественный Музей	23 D2
Trubetsky House Museum	
Дом Трубетцкого	24 E2
Volkonsky House Museum	
Дом Волконского	25 F2
Wooden Houses	26 E2

SLEEPING

Arena Obshezhitnye	27 D2
Baikal Business Centre	28 B3
Baikaler Hostel	29 C3
Hotel Agat Гостиница Агат	30 B2
Hotel Angara	
Гостиница Ангара	31 C2
Hotel Baikal	
Гостиница Байкал	32 B3
Hotel Delta Отель Дельта	33 E3
Hotel Gloria Отель Глория	34 F4
Hotel Gornyak	
Гостиница Горняк	35 C4
Hotel Profsoyuznaya	
Общезижитие Гостиничного Типа Профсоюзная	36 B3
Hotel Rus Гостиница Русь	37 C2
Irkutsk Downtown Hostel	38 B2
Resting Rooms	
Комнаты Отдыха	39 A3
Solnyshonok	
Отель Солнышонок	40 B3
Sun Hotel Отель Солнце	41 B3
Uzory Узоры	42 F2

EATING

Arbatsky Dvorik	
Арбатский Дворик	(see 44)
Domino Домино	43 C3
Fiesta Фиеста	44 D3
Figaro Pizza Фигаро Пицца	45 F4
Kafe 16 Кафе 16	46 D3
Kafe Temp	47 D4
Kino Kafe Кино Кафе	48 C3
Pervach	49 C2
Snezhinka Снежинка	50 D2
U Dzhuzeppe У Джузеппе	51 C4
Wiener Café Венское Кафе	52 C2

DRINKING

Cheshskaya Pivovarnaya	
Чешская Пивоварная	53 F2
Liverpool Паb Ливерпуль	54 D2
Peshchera Пещера	(see 57)
Russkaya Chaunaya	
Русская Чайная	55 C4
U Shveyka У Швейка	56 E1

ENTERTAINMENT

Circus Цирк	57 D2
Musical Theatre	
Музыкальный Театр	58 D4
Orkhlopkov Drama Theatre	59 C4
Organ Hall	
Органный Зал	60 C1
Philharmonic Hall	
Филармония	61 D4
Poznaya Disko-Bar	
Позная Диско-Бар	62 D2
Stratosfera Night Club	
Ночной Клуб Стратосфера	63 D3

TRANSPORT

Bus Station	
Автовокзал	64 F1
Central Air Agency	
Центральная Аэрокасса	65 D2
Hydrofoils to Bratsk	
Речной Вокзал	66 B2
Marshrutka No 12	67 A3
Marshrutka No 16 to Raketa	
Marshrutky No 16 to City Centre, Nos 12 & 72 across Dam to Train Station	69 B4
Marshrutky Nos 16 & 20	70 A3
Marshrutky to Listvyanka	71 F1
MIAT	(see 6)
Raketa Bus Stop	72 B4
Raketa Hydrofoil Station	
Пристань	73 B4
Tram No 4	74 E2
Tram No 4	75 F2
Tram No 4 Stop for Kazansky Church	76 F1
Tram No 4 Terminus	77 E3
Tram No 5 to City Centre	78 B3
Tram No 5 to SibExpo Area	79 E3
Tram Nos 1 & 2	80 A2
Tram Nos 1 & 2	81 A3
Tram Nos 1 & 2	82 B2
Tram Nos 1 & 2	83 D4
Tram Nos 1 & 2 from Train Station	84 C3
Tram Nos 1 & 2 to Train Station	85 C3

THE DECEMBRIST MOVEMENT

Across Siberia, notably in Irkutsk, Chita and Novoselenginsk, interesting museums commemorate the 'Decembrist' gentlemen-rebels. This group of aristocratic, liberal-leaning army officers had occupied Senate Sq in St Petersburg in an ill-conceived coup against Tsar Nicholas I. The date was 26 December 1825, hence their soubriquet.

The mutineers were poorly organised and outnumbered, but Nicholas I was loathe to mark the start of his reign with a full-blown domestic massacre. After a stand-off, which lasted most of the day, troops fired several canister shots into the square killing about 60 people. The rebellion crumbled and five leaders were executed. Another 121 organisers were sentenced to hard labour, prison and exile in Siberia where they became romantic heroes of a sort. But the real heroes were their womenfolk, many of whom abandoned their lives of comfort and sophistication to follow their husbands or lovers into exile. The first was the faithful Yekaterina Trubetskaya. The story goes that having travelled 6000km by coach to Nerchinsk, she immediately descended into the silver mines to find her husband.

Others had to wait for months in Irkutsk or Chita for permission to see their men, meanwhile setting up small social circles that encouraged 'Western civilisation' in these hitherto wild-east backwaters. Over two decades the exiled families opened schools, formed scientific societies and edited newspapers. Maria Volkonskaya, popularly known as the 'Princess of Siberia', founded a local hospital and opened a concert theatre, in addition to hosting musical and cultural soirees in her home.

The Decembrists were granted amnesty when Nicholas I died in 1855. Although many of them, including Maria Volkonskaya, returned to St Petersburg, their legacy lived on for decades.

Marka 47), which has a sporadically open museum and occasional concerts of patriotic songs.

CHURCHES

The formerly magnificent Annunciation Cathedral, which once dominated pl Kir-ova, was extensively damaged in the Russian Civil War and demolished to make way for a hulking Party headquarters, now the regional administration building. The cathedral is still visible in photos exhibited in the belfry-museum of the 18th-century **Saviour's Church** (Spasskaya Tserkov; ul Sukhe-Batora; admission R100; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), whose exhibits are less exciting than the views from the top (if you're allowed up).

Much more eye-catching is the fairy-tale ensemble of the **Bogoyavlensky Cathedral** (ul Nizhnaya Naberezhnaya; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) whose ongoing restoration continues to add a colourful dazzle to the otherwise rather grimy riverfront.

Set in a leafy garden the 1762 **Znamensky Monastery** is 1.5km beyond, behind a noisy traffic circle. Echoing with mellifluous plainsong, the interior has splendidly mullered vaulting, a towering iconostasis and a gold sarcophagus holding the miraculous relics of Siberian missionary St Innokent.

Celebrity graves outside include those of Decembrist darling Yekaterina Trubetskaya (see above) and of explorer Grigory Shelekhov, who claimed Alaska for Russia. Out the front is a 2004 **statue** of Arctic explorer turned White-Russian commander Admiral Kolchak, who was executed nearby by Bolshevik troops in 1919. Some still see him as a traitor for fighting against Lenin's men, hence the exaggeratedly high plinth to reduce vandalism.

Built in 1758, the baroque **Raising of the Cross Church** (Krestovozdvizhenskaya Tserkov; ul Sedova) is one of the few churches that remained open to worshippers during the Soviet era. It dominates the skyline of Irkutsk seen from the Trans-Siberian Railway.

OTHER HISTORIC STRUCTURES

A few charming **wooden houses** with lacy, carved decoration can still be found in Irkutsk's older neighbourhoods, especially on ul Dekabriskikh Sobyty east of ul Timiryazeva. The grandest brick architecture is along ul Karla Marksa, which hosts various minor museums. Opposite the Regional Museum is the former **White House** (Bely dom; ul Karla Marksa), built in 1804 as the residence of the governors general of Eastern Siberia. It's now a university science library.

NERPA SEALS

Nessie and Tito, two much-loved *nerpa* (Baikal freshwater seals), perform 'shows' every half-hour at **Akvarium Nerpy** (☎ 435 047; ul 2-Zheleznodorozhnaya 66; admission R70; ☎ 11am-6.30pm Wed-Sun). Feats include 'singing' (nasal flatulence?!), break-dancing, ball-tossing and even basic mathematics! Take *marshrutka* (fixed route minibus) 3.

ANGARA DAM & SIBEXPO AREA

Some 6km southeast of the city centre, the 1956 **Angara Dam** is 44m high and 2km long. Its construction raised Lake Baikal by up to 6m causing various human and environmental problems. The dam itself is hardly an attraction, but moored nearby is the **Angara steamship**. This icebreaker ferry was originally imported in kit form from England to carry Trans-Siberian Railway passengers across Lake Baikal. The trains went on her bigger sister-ship *Baikal*, which sank years ago. Officially closed to visitors, the Angara is currently used as a drinks store for a nearby summer café, but the impressive engines still work, as you might see should the café owner decide to befriend you.

Sleeping

Tourist agencies can arrange homestays in Irkutsk and the villages around Lake Baikal. Prices start at around R500 per bed, though R800 is more common. Check the location you're offered: the cheapest places can be 10km or more from the city centre. Finding accommodation in Irkutsk can be tricky in summer and phone reservations aren't always honoured, so consider faxing a confirmation (there'll be a charge). Hostels accept email bookings without a fee.

Irkutsk has three new if tiny private youth hostels. All have good, shared toilets, shower and kitchen. All are ideal for finding English-speaking assistance and meeting fellow travellers.

BUDGET

Baikaler Hostel (☎ 336 240; www.baikaler.com; Apt 11, ul Lenina 9; dm R500; ☎) Super central, beds are limited at this wonderful homestay-hostel. No drop-ins without prior reservation.

Irkutsk Downtown Hostel (☎ 334 597; www.downtownhostel.irkutsk.ru; Apt 12, ul Stepana Razina 12; dm/d R400/1080) Cosy, 10-bed apartment-hostel above the Yantar grocery. Enter from rear

door spray-graffitied 'Hostel'. Phone ahead for the door entry code. Though central, this area is slightly dubious at night.

Baikalhostel (☎ 525 742 or 527 798; www.baikalhostels.com; Apt 1, ul Lermontova 136; dm €9-10) German-owned hostel with rave reviews from travellers despite the inconvenient and insalubrious location, several kilometres south of the train station: take *marshrutka* 12 to Mikrochirurgia Glaza stop.

Hotel Gornyyak (☎ 243 754; ul Lenina 24, enter from ul Dzerzhinskogo; s R900-1200, tw R1800) Friendly, central and small, the Gornyyak has reasonably presentable rooms with private shower and toilet, some affected by road noise. Per hour rates available.

Uzory (☎ 209 239; ul Oktyabrskoy Revolyutsii 17; s/tw/tr R550/800/1200) Clean, unpretentious rooms with leopard-skin patterned blankets. The communal toilets and shower are being rebuilt. Apocryphal backpacker folklore claims that impecunious travellers can get discounts for sleeping on the billiard table.

Hotel Profsoyuznaya (Obshchezhitie Gostinichogo Tipa Profsoyuznaya; ☎ 357 963; fax 357 855 for bookings; ul Baikalskaya 263; dm R295, tw R590-708, tr R826) Simple but well-kept Soviet-era rooms, albeit far from the city centre in the distant Sib-Expo area. Tram 5 stops outside.

Arena Obshchezhitie (☎ 334 663; ul Sverdlova 39; s/tw/tr/q R300/600/900/1200) Staff are grumpy and rooms are ragged, but no worse than you'd expect for the price. Entered through a warren of prison-like brown-metal doors, it's very central and often full.

Hotel Agat (☎ 242 320; ul Piyatoy Armii 12; tw R1000) Uninspired but with clean communal toilet and shower. Plenty of peeling paint.

Resting Rooms (Irkutsk train station; r per hr R18, plus sheets R40) There are also rooms available at the train station.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Zvezda (☎ 540 000; www.zvezdahotel.ru; ul Yadrintseva 1zh; s/d R2900/3300, ste R5500-9000; ☎ ☎ ☎) Inviting Swiss chalet-style hotel, with modern rooms, attentive service and English-speaking staff. On the way to the airport down a side street off ul Sovetskaya.

Sun Hotel (☎ 255 910; www.xemi.com/sunhotel; ul Baikalskaya 295B; s €100-115, d €120-135; ☎ ☎ ☎) Unusually stylish with dark-wood furnishings and impressive bathrooms, though inconveniently located. Reception staff speak English, but the lobby lacks facilities.

Solnyshonok (3rd fl, ul Baikalskaya 259; s/d €50/65) Next-door sister hotel to the Sun Hotel, Solnyshonok is cheaper, but lacks a lift.

Hotel Gloria (☎ 540 326; www.gloriahotel.ru; ul Sovetskaya 58; s/tw/d R3200/3600/3600, ste R5000-5500; ☺) New pastel-beige tower with nine international-class rooms and two bigger suites, which have bath as well as shower. English is spoken and the minibars overflow with alcoholic choice.

Hotel Delta (☎ 217 876; www.grandbaikal.ru; ul Karla Libknekhta 58; s/d R2000/3000) Motel-standard rooms with little panache, but good value for its relatively central position. It's vastly preferable to the old Soviet hotels.

Hotel Rus (☎ 242 715; http://rus.baikal.ru; ul Sverdlova 19; s R1457-1603, d R1845, ste R2710-2981) Cosy by Soviet standards, but redecoration of the rooms is skin-deep. There's a great village-style restaurant here, too.

Hotel Baikal (Hotel Intourist, Hotel Irkutsk; ☎ 250 167; www.baikal-hotel.ru; bul Gagarina 44; s R1500, tw R2370-3200) This presentable Soviet-era concrete slab has upgraded rooms, some with good river views. Only the most expensive doubles come close to Western standards.

Other possibilities:

Baikal Business Centre (☎ 259120; www.bbc.ru; Baikalskaya ul; s/tw R3400/4200; ☐ ☺) Functionally upper-market business hotel.

Hotel Angara (☎ 255 105; www.angarahotel.ru; ul Sukhe-Batora 7; s/d from R1400/2100) Central but outrageously overpriced. Room quality varies.

Eating

The modern but lively **Central Market** (ul Chekhova) overflows with fresh produce, while cafés and restaurants abound, especially along ul Karla Marksa.

Pervach (☎ 202 288; ul Chkalova 33; meals R240-350) Pervach offers imaginative Baikal-based menus in a vaulted stone and brick basement, heated by real fires in winter. Some English is spoken.

Kafe 16 (☎ 242 682; ul Sukhe-Batora 16; coffees R40-80, meals R270-500; ☺ 10am-11pm) Enticing brown and beige tones purring with jazz beckon you through a unique Art-Deco clamshell archway. Hard-hitting espressos (R40), French wines (R80 per glass) and great garlic-edged fried cheese starters.

Arbatsky Dvorik (☎ 200 633; ul Uritskogo; meals R450-800; ☺ 11am-midnight) An upmarket restaurant with an English menu, and a remarkable interior of imitation house-fronts, doorways

and lanterns. Access is incongruously by walking through congenial, ever-popular **Fiesta** (snacks R45-120; ☺ noon-11pm), a fast-food eatery.

Snezhinka (☎ 344 862; opp ul Karla Marksa 25; meals R220-330; ☺ 11am-midnight) Warm, cosy *belle-époque* café-restaurant, with attentive service and consistently good food.

U Dzhuzeppe (☎ 258 348; Stadium arches; meals R70-170; ☺ 11am-11pm) Almost-elegant décor and sensible prices, with menu items like fruity eggplant (R90) and stuffed squid (R110). Menu in English.

Figaro Pizza (☎ 270 607; ul Sovetskaya 58; pizza R100-270, beers from R50; ☺ 10am-midnight) The most authentic pizzeria in town.

CAFÉS

Wiener Café (Venskoye Kafe; ☎ 202 116; ul Stepana Razina 19; coffees R40-70, meals R180-300; ☺ 10am-11pm) Marble-top tables, Parisian bar-chairs and sepia photos with a separate window for takeaway pastries.

Kino Kafe (ul Karla Marksa 22; tea R3, beers R20, snacks R10-40; ☺ 11am-10pm) Within the architecturally delightful Khudozhestveny Cinema is a basic, supercheap café and handy toilet. Enter from ul Krasnoarmeyskaya and walk past the ticket windows and art exhibits.

QUICK EATS

Domino (ul Lenina 13A; meals R70-140; ☺ 24hr) Popular for all-night fast food.

Blinnaya (ul Sukhe-Batora; meals R40-90; ☺ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) A cheap yet neat mini cafeteria-café.

Kafe Temp (ul Lenina 25; meals R40-70; ☺ 10am-8pm) Archetypal 1970s décor would make this perfect for a Soviet nostalgia movie. Food is approximately edible.

Russkaya Chaynaya (☎ 201 678; ul Karla Marksa 3; coffees R40-100, meals R200-350; ☺ 10am-11pm) Splendid *fin-de-siècle* interior and summer beer garden.

Drinking

Liverpool (☎ 202 512; ul Sverdlova 28; imported beers R50-100; ☺ noon-late) It's a superbly idiosyncratic Beatles theme-pub. Newcastle Brown Ale in Irkutsk – whatever next?

U Shveyka (☎ 242 687; ul Karla Marksa 34; beers R50-55, meals R170-400; ☺ noon-midnight; ☺) This atmospheric cavern with staring elk-head and yin-yang condiments also has a good summer beer terrace.

Cheshskaya Pivovarnaya (☎ 538 482; Krasnogvardeyskaya ul 29; beers R47-53, meals R180-300; ☺ noon-midnight) This unpretentious microbrewery-pub creates its own Czech-style pilsner.

Peshchera (☎ 243 414; Circus Bldg, ul Zhelyabova; beers R35; ☺ 11am-11pm) It's the liveliest of four smoky, semicheap bars set into the sides of the circus building.

Entertainment

On summer evenings romantic couples and jolly groups of locals stroll the Angara promenade and grassy areas behind the fine **Okhlopov Drama Theatre** (☎ 333 361; ul Karla Marksa 14).

Circus (☎ 336 139; ul Zhelyabova; seats R100-250) Puts on eye-boggling Cirque du Soleil-style performances. Avoid the cheapest front seats where you'll get poor views and a regular splashing.

Philharmonic Hall (☎ 245 076; ul Dzerzhinskogo 2) This historic building stages regular children's shows and musical programmes from pop to classical.

Musical Theatre (☎ 342 131; ul Sedova; seats R60-300; ☺ ticket office 11am-6.30pm Tue-Sun) Pantomimes, costumed musical-comedy shows and ballets take place here in a big concrete auditorium.

Organ Hall (pl Kirova) Organ concerts are held in the 1881 Polish Catholic church.

Stratosfera Night Club (www.strata-club.ru; ul Karla Marksa 15; admission from R100; ☺ 6pm-6am Fri-Sun) Irkutsk's late-night hot spot has a bowling alley, two-storey disco and three-storey drink prices.

Poznaya Disko-bar (ul Chekhova 17; admission R50; beers R45; ☺ 9pm-late) This tobacco-fugged dive is popular with student drinkers on modest budgets, but it can be rough.

Getting There & Away

AIR
Irkutsk's antiquated little 'international' airport is near the city centre. Foreign destinations include Shenyang (US\$170) and Tianjin (US\$330), both twice weekly. **MIAT** (☎ 203 458; www.miat.com; ul Lapina 11), based at the Mongolian consulate, flies to Ulaanbaatar (US\$210) twice or thrice weekly; prices discounted to as little as US\$64 in winter.

Dozens of domestic destinations include Moscow (from R6650, daily), St Petersburg (from R7500, three per week), Yekaterinburg (R7680, eight weekly), Vladivostok (10

weekly) and Khabarovsk (R5450 to 6200, six per week).

Handy regional hops available include Kyzyl (R3940, Saturday) in Tuva and Nizhneangarsk (R2160) for Severobaikalsk (twice weekly).

Tickets are sold by a convenient **Central Air Agency** (☎ 201 517; ul Gorkogo 29; ☺ 8am-7pm).

BOAT

In July and August hydrofoils buzz right up Lake Baikal to Severobaikalsk and Nizhneangarsk (R1400, 1½ hours) stopping en route in Port Baikal (change of boats possible) and Olkhon Island (R1100). Departures from Irkutsk are timetabled at 8.50am on Tuesday and Friday, returning next day, but changes and cancellations are fairly frequent. An extra Irkutsk-Olkhon-Irkutsk service runs on some Thursdays. There's an airline-style baggage limit.

Between once and four times daily, June to September, hydrofoils also serve Listvyanka (R130, 1¼ hours) and Bolshie Koty (R180, 1¾ hours).

All of the above depart from the 'Raketa' hydrofoil station beyond the Angara dam in Solnechny mikrorayon, two minutes' walk from bus 16 stop 'Raketa'.

From a different jetty beside Kafe Iveriya, **VSRR** (☎ 287 467) hydrofoils run to Bratsk (R460, 12½ hours) on Tuesday, Saturday and certain Thursdays from June to late September.

BUS

The Visitor Information Office organises minibuses to Olkhon Island. From the **bus station** (☎ 209 115; ☺ 6am-7pm) book tickets ahead for Arshan (R220, 8am) and Khuzhir on Olkhon Island (R370, 9am). For Listvyanka, buses (R30, 1¼ hours, five daily) are supplemented by fairly regular *marshrutky* (R60, 50 minutes) leaving when full from outside. For Bratsk, comfortable private express buses have special ticket booths opposite the bus station.

TRAIN

The elegant old train station has numbered sections. No 1 has advance domestic ticketing. No 2 sells same-day domestic tickets. Upstairs in area No 3 is the **Servis Tsentr** (☎ 636 501) for **international tickets** (☺ 8am-7pm) and the resting rooms, while downstairs

is left-luggage. A fourth area beyond sells *elektrichka* (suburban train) tickets to local destinations, including Slyudyanka (R38.20) via Tyomnaya Pad, and is the access route to platforms.

Though expensive, the best train to/from Moscow is the 9/10 *Baikal* (R4150 *kupe*, 77 hours). *Platskart* berths on slower trains, such as train 240/250 (87 hours), cost only R1820 via Krasnoyarsk (R505, 19 hours).

There are several alternate-day trains for Vladivostok, including trains 2 (R3840 *kupe*, 72 hours) and 230 (R3400 *kupe*, 75 hours) via Khabarovsk (58 to 60 hours).

Trains for Beijing (R3800) pass through Irkutsk on Tuesday at 9am or via Mongolia on Saturday at 6am. Trains to Ulaanbaatar cost R1600: fast train 6 (Friday and Saturday) is a full 10 hours quicker than the daily 364 (35 hours).

In any case, heading east consider stopping in Ulan-Ude. That's eight hours away, but worth travelling by day to enjoy the views of Lake Baikal en route.

Train tickets are also sold at the Central Air Agency (commission R80), Hotel Baikal (commission R100 domestic, R300 international) and upstairs in the airport (commission R70).

Getting Around

From the train station, *marshrutka* 20 runs through the city centre to the airport, trams 1 and 2 run to uls Lenina and Timiryazeva, while bus 7 crosses to pl Kirova, then loops round the city centre and out past the Znamenskaya Monastery. Bus 16 continues down ul Lenina, past the Raising of the Cross Church and (eventually) the dam looping back past the hydrofoil station to the Angara steamship. Slow tram 5 from Hotel Profsoyuznaya trundles to the Central Market, from where tram 4 goes past the bus station. Trolleybus 4 (R5) links the city centre to the airport via Hotel Gloria.

Within the central area, walking is usually the best idea.

WESTERN LAKE BAIKAL

Lake Baikal, the 'Pearl of Siberia', is a crystal-clear body of the bluest water. It's drinkably pure, surrounded by rocky, tree-covered cliffs and so vast that one can sail for hours without the mountain backdrops becoming appreciably closer.

Shaped like a banana, Lake Baikal – 636km from north to south, but only 60km wide – was formed by rifting tectonic plates. Though nearly 8km of the rift is filled with sediment, it is gradually getting deeper as the plates separate. It will eventually become the earth's fifth ocean, splitting the Asian continent. In the meantime it's the world's deepest lake: 1637m near the western shore. As such, it contains nearly one-fifth of the world's fresh, unfrozen water – more than North America's five Great Lakes combined.

Swimmers brave enough to face Baikal's icy waters (never warmer than about 15°C) risk vertigo, as it is possible to see down as far as 40m. In February and March one can drive right across on the 1m-thick ice, though this is safest in the north and most practical between Severobaikalsk (p244) and Ust-Barguzin (accessed from Ulan-Ude, p213).

The lake itself is a living museum of flora and fauna, 80% of which is found nowhere else on the planet, most famously the lovable black-eyed *nerpa* (freshwater seals) and salmon-like *omul* fish which are delicious smoked. For more details on Baikal, see p59 and p63.

Taltsy Museum of Wooden Architecture

Музей Деревянного Зодчества Тальцы About 47km east of Irkutsk, 23km before Listvyanka, **Taltsy** (foreigner/local R80/20 plus camera fees; ☎ 10am-6pm summer, 10am-4pm winter) is an impressive outdoor collection of old Siberian buildings set in a delightful riverside forest. Amid the renovated farmsteads are two chapels, a church, a watermill, some Tungusi graves and the eye-catching 17th-century Iliminsk Ostrog watchtower. Listvyanka-Irkutsk buses stop on request at Taltsy's apparently deserted entrance access road. Don't worry. The ticket booth is only a minute's walk through the forest.

Listvyanka ЛИСТВЯНКА

☎ 3952 / pop 2500 / ☎ Moscow + 5hr The nearest Lake Baikal village to Irkutsk, Listvyanka offers winter dog-sledding, summer boat and horse rides and is ideal for watching the Siberian nouveau riche at play. Without doubt it's Baikal's most visited tourist spot. Yet outside busy weekends, the village is still reasonably quiet, with inspir-

ing views towards the distant snowcapped Kamar Daban Mountains.

Hugging the Baikal banks, ul Gorkogo is the main road from Irkutsk, though it doubles as a strolling promenade. It links three disconnected valleys of old wooden cottages. Two of these, ul Gudina (east) and ul Chapaeva (west) are either side of the port area where hydrofoils arrive and buses terminate at a little market. The wider Krestovka valley (uls Ostrovskogo, Kulikova and Gornaya) is 15 minutes' walk west towards Irkutsk. Another 2km west at Rogatka is the Limnological Institute and the ferry jetty for Port Baikal. Central Nikola is centred 4km beyond that.

Basic maps are available on www.irkutsk.org/fed/maps/listmap.jpg and sold from a small, helpful tourist information booth, which opens sporadically at the port/bus stand.

SIGHTS

Having glimpsed Lake Baikal and eaten fresh-smoked *omul* fish at the port, many visitors are left vaguely wondering what to do next. Fishing-boat rides (charters from R800 per hour) or gentle strolls are a common time-filler with old log cottages to photograph up uls Gudina and Chapaeva, though ongoing gentrification is starting to impinge on their architectural integrity. About 2km west in **Krestovka**, the pretty if unremarkable **Svyato-Nikolskaya Church** was named for an apparition of St Nicholas, which supposedly saved its sponsor from a Baikal shipwreck.

Another 2km towards Irkutsk at **Rogatka**, tour groups are herded into the **Limnological Institute** (☎ 250 551; ul Akademicheskaya 1; foreigner/local R180/80; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm rest of year), where gruesomely discoloured fish samples and seal embryos in formaldehyde are now supplemented with tanks containing a sad, living *nerpa* seal and various Baikal fish that you'd otherwise encounter on restaurant menus.

Walking up the hill behind the Soviet-era Baikal Hotel leads to some attractive viewpoints from a short ski-run.

ACTIVITIES

From December to March, **Baikal Dog Sledding Centre** (☎ 112 829 or 112 799; ole-tbaikaledog@mail.ru; ul Gornaya 17, Krestovka) offers thrilling dog-

sledding on forest tracks. The shortest 3km run with three dogs costs R600, but whole multiday cross-Baikal expeditions are possible with bigger dog teams. The owners' sons speak English.

On the warmer winter weekends snowmobiles and even horses can be informally hired on the ice near the Proshly Vek restaurant, while hovercraft rides are available from the main port area. On the beachfront, locals photograph each other in front of weirdly shaped frozen waves.

SLEEPING

There is a vast choice of accommodation. However, with minimal public transport, no taxi service and no left-luggage office, finding a room without reservations in summer can take some tiresome trekking around. Leave heavy bags in Irkutsk. Any accommodation under R500 is likely to be very basic with an outside squat toilet, dorm-style beds or both. Virtually every Irkutsk tour agent has its own guesthouse or homestay in Listvyanka, and the tourist office at the port can make suggestions when it opens.

There are a few handy but predominantly unexotic homestays on lakefront ul Gorkogo.

Along uls Gudina and Chapaeva, two ribbons of attractive wooden cottages, very basic homestays are available at ul Chapaeva 6, 44 and 64 and ul Gudina 77. If you want indoor toilets try ul Gudina 13a or 71, or ul Chapaeva 24, 65 or 69.

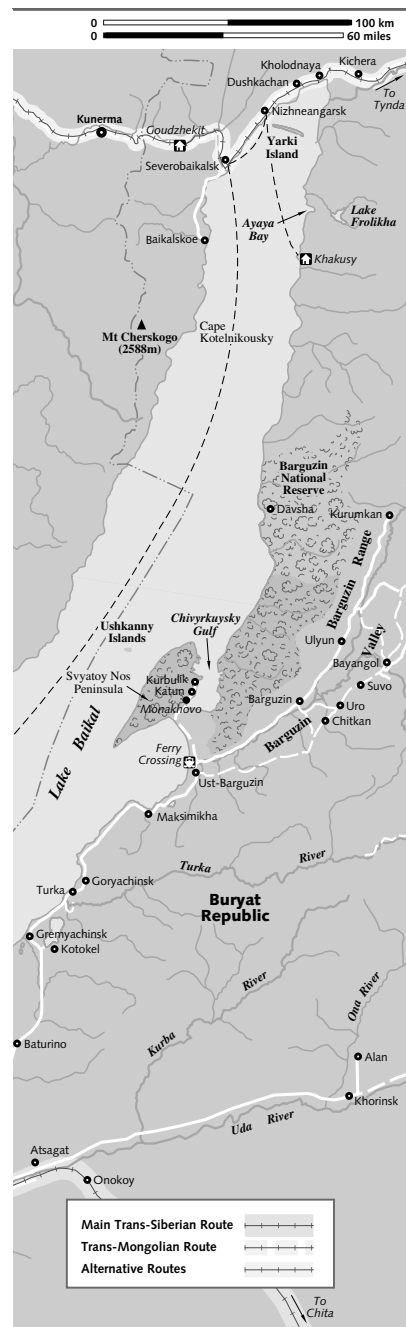
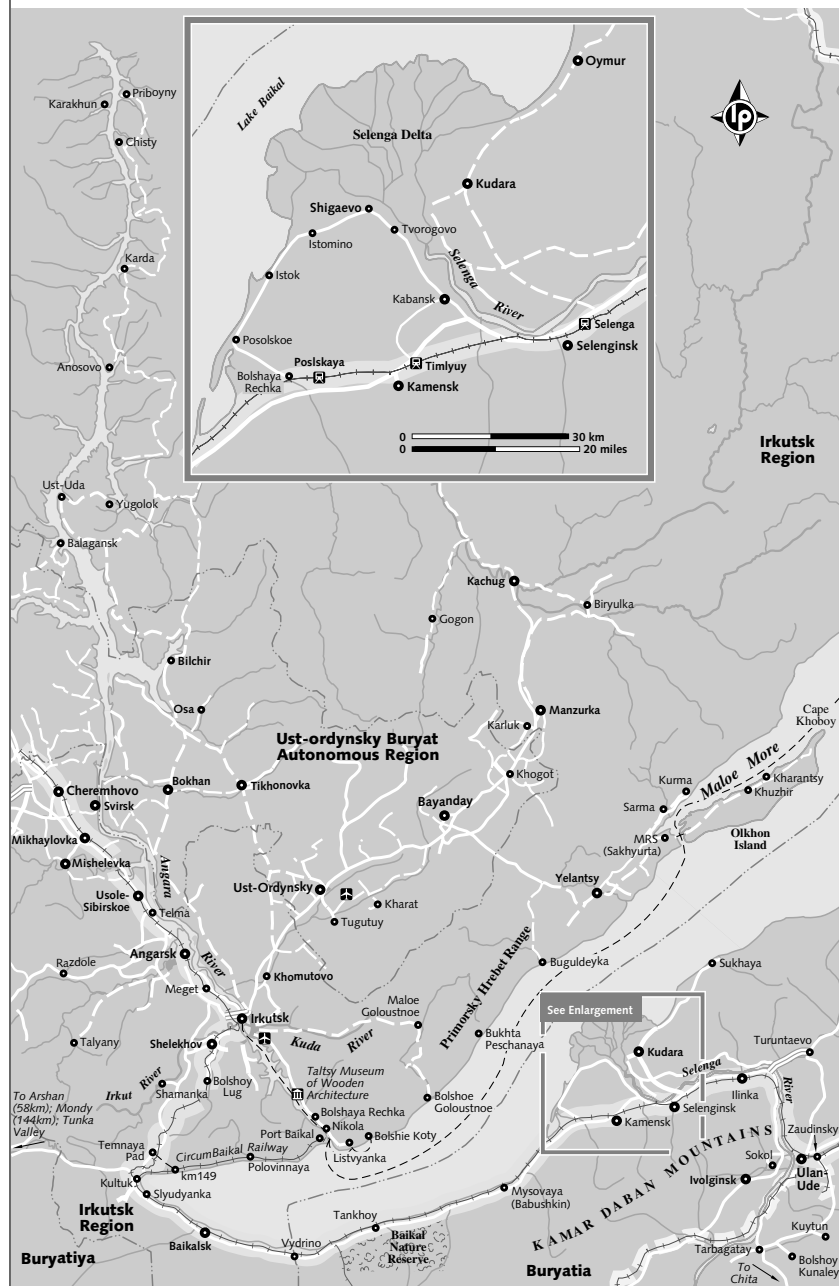
Slightly less convenient than the port area for public transport, Krestovka is nonetheless more of a 'real' village and offers an ever-expanding choice.

Several resorts are tucked invisibly away off the Listvyanka to Irkutsk road in Nikola, including around Nikola village which stretches 3km towards the Rogatka ferry-jetty. Often comfortable, but somewhat inconvenient if you lack your own transport.

Budget

Galina Vasilyevna's Homestay (☎ 112 798; ul Kulikova 44, Krestovka; dm/tr R300/900) Cheap, saggy dorm beds in a delightfully genuine old home with large traditional stove-heater, but minimal facilities. Ask for keys at the Darya grocery shop. An indoor toilet functions in summer.

BAIKAL



Priboyn (☎ 112 839; upper fl, ul Gorkogo 101; dm/tw R250/1200) Cheap but unappealing dorms right at the lakeside. Keys are available from the Askat shop (open 8am to 8pm) or the restaurant (open noon to 11pm) downstairs.

National Park Hostel (☎ 112 520; ul Gorkogo 39; dm R400) Three bare-bones three-bed dorms and a communal kitchen within the Pribaikalsky National Park information centre. The toilet doesn't work in winter.

Midrange

Derevenka (☎ 250 459; www.village2002.narod.ru; ul Gornaya 1, Krestovka; s/d R1300/1400, midsummer R1400/1700) On a ridge behind the Baikal-front road, this place offers lovely little wooden huts with stove-heaters, private toilets and hot water (but not showers). It's run by a friendly family, who can organise snowmobile, sled and boat rentals. *Banya* (hot bath, like a sauna) costs R200.

Baikalskiye Terema (☎ 112 599; info@greenexpress.ru; ul Gornaya 16, Krestovka; s/d R2500/2700) For Western comforts this fully equipped pine-furnished hotel remains Listvyanka's snazziest option. Half-price room rates are available for 12-hour stays. There's a sports-activities centre, but compare prices.

U Ozera (☎ 250 444; Irkutsk highway km3; d winter/summer R1800/2500) New, reasonably comfortable if cramped motel overlooking the lake, between Krestovka and Rogatka.

Ersi (☎ 112 546; www.ersi.baikal.ru; ul Chapaeva 65; tw R1000-1289) Cheaper than sleeping inside, take a R480 bed in the Mongolian ger-yurt tent. Nikolai speaks English, and can arrange boat and bicycle excursions when in residence.

Briz (☎ 250 468; www.baikal-briz.ru; ul Gudina 71; standard s/tw summer R1500/1700, winter R1200/1400) A good price-quality balance with in-room toilets and distant Baikal views from the nicer rooms. In summer there are more basic hut beds at R750.

Top End

Anastasia Resort (☎ 112 191; www.baikalhotel.ru; ul Angarskaya 8, Nikola; s R4500, d R5500-6000, ste R10,000-24,000; [P]) Splendid, comfortable new 18-room hotel complex sits right on the Angara waterside in central Nikola, with pretty views from many rooms. It's walking distance from an Irkutsk-Listvyanka bus stop, but about 7km from Listvyanka port.

EATING

Near the port are numerous vendors pedalling delicious smoked *omul* fish and cafés.

Shury Mury (☎ 250 452; sandwiches R25-60, meals R150-350; ☎ 10am-11pm) Has a lakeside summer terrace.

Proshly Vek (☎ 112 554; ul Lazlo 1; meals R200-470) The most atmospheric eatery, 2.5km west of the port between U Ozera and Krestovka.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Five daily buses (R30, 1¼ hours) and roughly hourly *marshrutky* run from Listvyanka port to Irkutsk passing the Limnological Institute, Nikola and Taltsy museum. Taxis from Irkutsk want at least R1000.

Mid-May to late September, hydrofoils stop at Listvyanka port between Irkutsk (R180) and Bolshie Koty (R80) at least daily, more frequently on weekends.

Year-round a tiny, battered car-ferry lumbers across the Angara to Port Baikal from Rogatka. It supposedly departs at 8.15am, 4.15pm and 6.15pm but times are by no means guaranteed.

Various short trips by yachts, fishing boat or even hovercraft are available at the main port depending on the season. For longer cruises inquire well ahead through Irkutsk agencies. In winter **Baikaler** (www.baikaler.com) runs a one-day excursion from Irkutsk to Listvyanka, Bolshie Koty and across the ice to a tunnel on the Circumbaikal Railway for R1200 per person.

Port Baikal Порт Байкал

☎ 3952

From 1900 to 1904 the Trans-Siberian Railway tracks led here from Irkutsk. They continued on Lake Baikal's far eastern shore at Mysovaya (Babushkin). The rail-less gap was plugged by ice-breaking steamships, including the *Angara*, now restored in Irkutsk (p195). Later the tracks were extended south and around the lake. This Circumbaikal Railway (p205) required so many impressive tunnels and bridges that it earned the nickname 'The Tsar's Jewelled Buckle'. With the damming of the Angara River in the 1950s, the original Irkutsk to Port Baikal railway section was submerged and replaced with an Irkutsk-Kultuk short cut (today's Trans-Siberian Railway). That left poor little Port Baikal to wither away at the dead end of a rarely used branch line.

Seen from Listvyanka across the unbridged mouth of the Angara River, Port Baikal looks like a rusty semi-industrial eyesore. But the view is misleading. A kilometre southwest of Stanitsa (the port area), Port Baikal's **Baranchiki** area is a ramshackle 'real' village, with lots of unkempt but authentic Siberian cottages and a handy selection of accommodation options. The village rises steeply, making for good short walks, with excellent Baikal viewpoints easily accessible. Awkward ferry connections mean that Port Baikal remains largely uncommercialised, lacking Listvyanka's 'attractions' but also its crowds. Thus it's popular with meditative painters and hikers. But its main draw is the Circumbaikal train ride from Slyudyanka (see p205).

SLEEPING & EATING

Yakhont (☎ 250 496 or 622 977; www.yahont.irk.ru; ul Naberezhnaya 3, Baranchiki; dm/tw R800/2400) This traditionally designed log house is decorated with eclectic good taste by well-travelled, English-speaking owners. Guests congregate in the stylish communal kitchen-diningroom, above which rooms have perfect Western bathrooms. For those on tighter budgets a cute but waterless cliff-front cottage offers an appealing dormitory option. Advance bookings are essential; major expansion is planned. See opposite for transport options.

B&B Baikal (☎ 250 463; www.baikal.tk; ul Baikalskaya 12, Baranchiki; bed/half-board R500/800) Set 400m back from the lakeside in a house with a conspicuous, wood-framed new picture window, various newly decorated but unpretentious rooms share two Western style toilets and a shower.

Anastasia Shishlonova's Homestay (ul Naberezhnaya 12-1, Baranchiki; bed/half-board R150/300) The delightful Shishlonova family offer rooms in their wonderfully positioned Baikal-facing home and a cute if minuscule hut-room in the yard. There's fresh milk from the cow, who greets you on the walk to the challenging pit-toilet. No running water.

Lyudmila Masalitin's Homestay (ul Vokzalnaya 7/2, Stanitsa; dm/q R150/600) In the unattractive Stanitsa area, this friendly homestay is great value and very handy for the Listvyanka ferry. The toilet is a scary outhouse.

As yet Port Baikal has no café, but there are three grocery kiosks at Baranchiki and two in Stanitsa.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The ferry to Listvyanka (20 minutes) runs year-round, supposedly three times daily at 7.10am, 3.50pm and 5.15pm, but times can change at whim. There are direct hydrofoils to Irkutsk (50 minutes) in summer. Rare trains come via the very slow Circumbaikal Railway. For guests, the Yakhont offers speed-boat charters (R2000 per hour) and R300 pick-ups to/from Listvyanka.

Bolshie Koty Большие Коты

pop 350
Founded by 19th-century gold miners, roadless Bolshiye Koty makes an easy day trip by boat or ice-drive from Listvyanka or a picturesque if somewhat hair-raising hike. The little **museum** opposite the jetty has a few pickled crustaceans and stuffed rodents. Otherwise, the village is simply a pleasant place to stroll, snooze and watch fish dry. A few basic homestays include ul Baikalskaya 55, with a lovely lakeside position, and neater, inland ul Zarechnaya 11b. Great fresh-smoked *omul* are sold at the port when boats arrive.

Hydrofoils originating in Irkutsk (R180) depart from Listvyanka (R80, 25 minutes) at least daily in summer, staying nearly two hours before returning. That's plenty for most visitors.

Olkhon Island Остров Ольхон

pop 1500 / ☎ Moscow + 5hr

Halfway up Baikal's western shore and reached by a short ferry journey from Sakhyurta (aka MRS), the serenely beautiful Olkhon Island is a wonderful place from which to view the lake and relax during a tour of Siberia.

Considered one of five global poles of shamanic energy by the Buryat people, the 72km-long island's main settlement is **Khuzhir**, which has seen something of a tourist boom over the last few years thanks mainly to the inspiring efforts of Nikita's Guest House, which also runs the **tourist information office** (☎ 9am-9pm) outside the guesthouse. For a good map of the island go to www.baikalex.com, or get printed maps from the tourist information office.

Although high season is July and August, also consider visiting here during the quiet winter months when you can drive across the ice to the island until early April.

Olkhozir was reconnected to the electricity grid in 2005 and mobile phones now work in Khuzhir, but as yet there are no landlines.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

There are unparalleled views of Baikal from sheer cliffs that rise at the island's northern end, culminating at dramatic **Cape Khoboy**. Day-long jeep trips, including lunch, cost (R350) and can be arranged through Nikita's Guest House and other guesthouses in Khuzhir.

Khuzhir's small **museum** (ul Pervomayskaya 24; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm), next to the village school, is worth a look. Consider dropping by **Nikita's Guest House** even if you aren't staying there to admire the inventive kid's playground and general atmosphere of the place. A short walk north of Nikita's, the unmistakable **Shaman Rocks** are neither huge nor spectacular, but they make a perfect meditative focus for the ever-changing cloudscapes across the picturesque Maloe More (Little Sea). East of the rocks is a long strip of sandy beach.

The island's southern end is rolling grassland – great for off-road mountain biking or gentle hiking, and if Baikal proves too cold for a dip you can cool off in the small **Shara-Nur Lake**.

SLEEPING & EATING

The large complex of upmarket-looking wooden cabins under construction at the time of research on the north edge of town will be the latest in an ever-growing range of places to stay in Khuzhir.

Irkutsk travel agents (p191) offer a choice of basic cottage homestays in Khuzhir for around R600 (full board). If you just show up there's a fair chance of finding a similar place from R450. Toilets are always outside the rooms and the *banya* will cost extra.

The village is small enough that it won't take you long to find the following recommended places.

Nikita's Guest House (http://olkhon.info; ul Kirpichnaya 8, Khuzhir; full board per person R530) Run by a former Russian table-tennis champ and his wife, Siberia's premier hang-out for travellers is a wonderful place to stay and eco-friendly to boot. If it's full (as it often is in high season), they'll find you a place to stay elsewhere in the village. The basic rooms on-site are attractively decorated. Scrub up

in an authentic *banya* and pig out on delicious home-cooked meals. There's a packed schedule of excursions and activities.

Solnechnaya (☎ 3952-389 103; www.web-olkhon.com; ul Solnechnaya 14; full board R510-570) Not quite as happening a scene as Nikita's, but still a pleasant place to stay offering a good range of activities. Accommodation is in two-storey cabins; cooler 1st-floor rooms being the more expensive.

Ventsak (ul Baikalskaya 42; full board per person R480) The most appealing of Khuzhir's smaller guesthouses has a handful of cabins in a quiet spot just off the village's main street. The shower and *banya* block is in good condition, and there's a comfortable communal lounge area.

Yurt Camp Harmony (www.greenexpress.ru; full board per person sharing 4-bed yurt R800) Several kilometres north of Khuzhir near the tiny hamlet of Kharansti, Green Express (p191) runs this camp site, with some 20 large circular felt tents shaded by trees on a lakeside. It's used for the company's tours but independent travellers can stay if there's room. Dog-cart rides are available in summer.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From June to August there are at least two and usually three daily buses between Khuzhir (R370, seven hours) and Irkutsk, with an additional minibus leaving from Nikita's Guest House daily at 8.30am (R300). Frequency drops off drastically outside the high season. With a little warning, agencies or hostels can usually find you a ride in a private car to Irkutsk (R700/2500 seat/car, 5½ hours). Prices include the short ferry ride to MRS. Mid-January to March an ice-road replaces the ferry. When the ice is partly formed or partly melted, the island is completely cut off for a few weeks.

In summer a hydrofoil service operates three times weekly from Irkutsk to Olkhon (R1100, seven hours), dropping passengers near the ferry terminal, from where it's possible to hitch a lift into Khuzhir. Two of the hydrofoils continue to Severobaikalsk.

Maloe More Малое Море

☎ 3952

The relatively warm, shallow waters of the **Maloe More** (Little Sea) offer a primary do-nothing holiday attraction for Siberians. Main attractions are swimming, hiking to

mini waterfalls, and drinking. Dozens of camps, huts and resorts are scattered amid attractive multiple bays backed by alternating woodland and rolling grassland scenery. Since each widely spaced 'resort' is frequently prebooked and hard to access without private transport, you'd be wise to first visit Irkutsk travel agents and leaf through their considerable catalogues. Booking something not too far from MRS makes it easier to continue later to Olkhon Island. Arguably the most appealing bay is **Bukhta Kurkutsкая**, where the Baza Otdykh Naratey has showers and bio-toilets. Several new resorts offer weekly transfers from Irkutsk for guests (around R400), such as **Baikal-Dar** (☎ 266 336; www.dar.irk.ru; d/tr full board R1600/2400). The further, Olkhon-facing **Khadarta Bay** between Sarma and Kurma is becoming ever more popular.

From June to late August minibuses run to Kurma (R380, 5½ hours) at 9am via Sarma (R320) from the courtyard of Irkutsk's Visitor Information Office. They return at 2pm the same day. Public buses from Irkutsk serve MRS.

SLYUDYANKA СЛЮДЯНКА

☎ 39544 / pop 18,800 / ✉ Moscow + 5hr

Lacking any architectural charm, Slyudyanka rarely tempts Westerners off the train. Yet the drab, functional town has a great lakeside setting, is backed by mountains and is the best place to start Circumbaikal train rides (opposite). It's also an ideal launching point for reaching the splendid, peak-backed Tunka Valley and its popular spa-village Arshan (opposite).

Slyudyanka 1, the famously all-stone **train station**, is a mere five minutes' walk from Lake Baikal's shore. Walking there you'll pass a photogenic timber **church** in multi-coloured, Scooby Doo style. The in-Russian **museum** (Kraevedchesky muzey; ☎ 2351; ul Zhelezodorozhnaya 22; admission R30; ☎ 11am-5pm Sun-Thu) across the tracks has some intriguing archaeological finds, but specialises in railway history. There's an old Circumbaikal Railway switching box and a very useful identification guide to 47 locomotive types from various eras.

With shared showers and seatless toilets, the simple, friendly **hotel** (☎ 23 071; ul Frunze 4, M/R Perival; dm/s/tw R300/400/800) charges half-price for 12-hour stays. To get there from

Slyudyanka 1 train station, cross the long footbridge and walk two blocks further: a little to your left you'll find a small **bus station** (ul Lenina), from where the hotel is 4km west by very frequent *marshrutka* 1 (last at 11pm). A taxi costs R40. Lugubriously UV-lit **Kafe Germez** (☎ 51 089; ul Lenina 54; meals R50-70) is halfway.

For better accommodation head 35km east to the smelly, lakeside ski-resort of **Baikalsk**, where the **Hotel Uyut** (☎ 37 312; www.baikaltur.ru; Stroitel'naya 13; d/low/mid season R800/1000, high season R1200-1600) is well equipped.

Trains from Irkutsk take approximately 3¼ hours (*elektrichka*) or 2½ hours (express) to Slyudyanka 1. Two cheap, slow, but incredibly scenic *elektrichka* trains run daily to Baikalsk (R18, 1½ hours), where Baikalsk Passazhirsky halt is much nearer the Uyut than Baikalsk mainline station.

Minibuses from outside Slyudyanka station depart to Arshan at the ungodly time

of 4.45am (this can be even earlier depending when train 125 arrives from Ulan-Ude). An additional bus to Arshan (R75, two hours) leaves at 2pm from the bus station, from where bus 103 runs six times daily to Baikalsk.

ARSHAN АРШАН

☎ 30156 / pop 900-3800 (seasonal) / ✉ Moscow + 5hr Sawtooth Sayan peaks rise spectacularly above the cute Buddhist villages of the wide, rural Tunka Valley. This area attracts wilderness hiker-climbers, but it's main draw is undoubtedly the little spa village of Arshan. It's nestled right at the foot of soaring forested mountains offering relaxing short walks to a series of rapids between sulphur-scented sips. There are plenty of longer, more challenging treks and climbs here, too. More detailed information is available at <http://tunki.baikal.ru> (in Russian).

CIRCUMBAIKAL RAILWAY

The historic Circumbaikal route (p33) from Slyudyanka to Port Baikal is one of Baikal's most popular tourist jaunts. Excruciatingly slow or a great social event? Opinions are mixed as the train chugs scenically along cliff ledges above the limpid lake waters on this lake-hugging branch line. You'll need to juggle sunglasses, a fan and a torch as the carriages are unventilated and unlit.

The most picturesque route sections are around **Polovinnaya** (approximately halfway) and the bridge area at **km149** (one hour from Slyudyanka), where there's also a small **Rerikh museum**. Views are best if you can persuade the driver to let you ride on the front of the locomotive – possible on certain tour packages. Note that from Port Baikal most trains travel by night, so are useless for sightseeing.

The Circumbaikal's old stone tunnels, stobly-cliff cuttings and bridges are an attraction even if you don't ride the train: in winter it's possible to drive alongside certain route-sections on ice-roads from Kultuk. Hiking sections of the peaceful track is also popular. Walking from Port Baikal leads to some pleasant if litter-marred beaches. Or get off an Irkutsk-Slyudyanka *elektrichka* train at Temnaya Pad and hike down the stream valley for about an hour. You should emerge at km149 on the Circumbaikal track. Continue by train to Port Baikal if you've timed things carefully.

Travelling the Circumbaikal

From a side platform at Slyudyanka I station, *matanya* (short, wooden-seated trains) currently depart at 1pm, two to four times weekly (R32, six hours) – check the timetables carefully. To get a seat you'll need to join the scrum to board around half an hour before departure. Get off at Baranchiki, the penultimate halt, for Port Baikal's best accommodation. In summer an additional tourist train direct from Irkutsk departs at around 7am on Saturdays. A wonderfully detailed website (<http://kbzd.irk.ru>) has regularly updated timetables, plus photographs of virtually every inch of the route.

There are roughly a dozen isolated *turbazy* (holiday camps) of varying quality along the route. Perhaps the most usefully positioned is the rambling, very basic **Baza Alpinistov** (☎ 902-178 3502; dm R100) at km149. Bring your own food. Alternatively, several Irkutsk travel agents run organised Circumbaikal tours (see p191). BaikalComplex includes a charter-ferry to get you to Listvyanka avoiding a forced overnight in Port Baikal.

Arshan's main street, ul Traktovaya, is patchily attractive where lined in places with old-fashioned log cottages. From the big, six-storey Sayan Sanatorium, this street heads 2km straight towards the mountains passing the post office, **Internet Zal** (ul Traktovaya 32; per hr R50; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 12.30-6pm Sat & Sun) and **bus-ticket kiosk** (ul Traktovaya 3). Then it swerves west past the **Altan Mundarga Information Booth** (☎ 97 502; ul Traktovaya 6) and the sprawling Kurort Arshan resort. Keep walking 20 minutes through the forest to find the dinky little **Badkhirkharmata datsan** (Buddhist temple) set in an idyllic mountain-backed glade. Or walk up tracks beside the stream to access the mountain footpaths.

SLEEPING

Many log cottages offer very basic home-stays from R100 per bed. Look for Дом/Жильё signs.

Priyut Alpinista (☎ 97 697; www.iwf.ru; ul Bratev Domshevikh 8; tw R800-1000, tr R1300) This characterful new climbers' centre has the atmosphere of a Western youth hostel, but rooms have private toilet and better ones have hot showers. Rent bicycles (R65 per hour), buy climbing maps (R25) and watch videos of Arshan's attractions in the comfortable sitting room before adding comments to the 'magic tree'. It's a modest wooden building three minutes' walk along ul Pavlova from the bus stand. The owners also offer pre-erected, supplied tent-places high in the mountains (R350 per person, including food) so that hikers and mountaineers don't need to carry a rucksack.

Hotel Zamok Gornogo Korolya (☎ 97 384; ul Gagarina 18; d R1700-2100) This modern pseudo-castle building has crenellations, green-

tipped towers and four comfortable, semi-smart rooms, with questionable 'artistic' taste in nude derrières.

Kurort Arshan (☎ 97 745; ul Traktovaya 1; dm/s R150/215; reception ☎ 8am-8pm summer, 9am-1pm & 4-7pm winter) Basic institutional sanatorium with various sized buildings spread through the forest, used mostly by cure-seekers using its mineral springs.

Pansionat Sagaan Dali (☎ 97 468; www.sagaan.ru; ul Deputatskaya 14; s/d/ste R390/780/1170; Ⓟ) Inexpensive but with all the charm of a 1970s council block, rooms are cosmetically upgraded, though still have rather sad old toilets. Suites are bigger but not better. The access footpath from ul Traktovaya skirts the Sayan Sanatorium passing a spluttering sulphurous spring-water faucet marked by prayer flags.

EATING

Sayan Kafe (meals R200-400; ☎ noon-11pm) Easily missed within the grounds of the Sayan Sanatorium, this small café is Arshan's nicest eatery.

Much cheaper snacks are available from a rustic unmarked **tea house** (ul Traktovaya 1; beers R30), beside Visit grocery shop, and from a bright if unrepentantly Soviet **stolovaya** (canteen; ul Traktovaya 13; meals R35-50; ☎ 9am-7pm), near the post office.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses run to Kyren (R35, 1¼ hours, 10.30am, noon and 2pm), Slyudyanka (R75, 7.30am and 2pm), Ulan-Ude (R332, 11 hours, 7.30am Tuesday to Sunday) and Irkutsk (R220, 2pm). Buses are sometimes replaced and/or supplemented by *marshrutky*, which cost somewhat more.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'